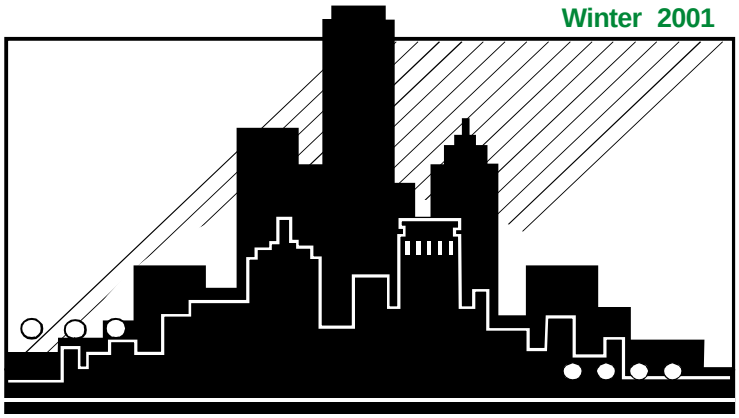
Conservation and your Community

The key to conservation is Community!

Winter 2001



Volume 4, Issue 4

U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service Chicago Metro Urban & Community Assistance Office

Open Space Zoning: A Win-Win Alternative

By: Randall Arendt. (Taken from the proceedings of the 1999 "Keep America Growing" Conference, Philadelphia, PA)

As development pressure threatens productive and picturesque fields and pastures across the country, local and state governments continue to experiment with a variety of tools to help farmers protect their land. One technique attracting a considerable amount of interest in the Northeast is "open space zoning."

With its relative simplicity, low cost, and fairness to developers and rural landowners, this new approach could help many communities meet development needs while keeping their productive agricultural landscape intact.

Open space zoning uses land use planning to achieve a balance between necessary growth and farm land protection. Under this technique, houses and commercial buildings are grouped closer together to preserve nearby farmland and other open space. While in this aspect it is similar to cluster development, open space zoning offers a significant improvement by establishing greater requirements on the size and quality of the open space protected. Limiting the amount of agricultural land that can be built upon, open space zoning requires that new developments be laid out so that no more than half of the farmland is lost to housing lots and streets.

Planners work with farmers to arrange lots in a farm's woodland areas or along one or two sides of a farm on less fertile soil. This ensures that only the smallest amount and least productive land is developed. The adjoining farmland remains in the farmer's hands, permanently protected through the use of conservation easements. Although house lots are reduced in size, views of nearby open space are guaranteed to remain attractive, forever free from future development.

Benefits for Farmers and Farmland

Open space zoning offers multiple benefits to farmers, developers and homeowners, as well as to the land itself. Instead of losing their entire farm to development, farmers retain ownership of at least one half of the farm yet still receive full value for their "development rights." Farmers – knowing the land's capabilities better than anyone else – are encouraged to become involved in the design process, thus having a voice in the way development affects their own communities and way of life. Through this participation, farmers with a mixture of open land and woodland, for example, can "transfer" development from a productive "south field" to the less productive (but suitable for construction) "north woods" at the other end of the tract.

If a farmer wishes to retire and has no family members interested in carrying on, open space zoning can enable the farm to be sold to a developer without it being taken entirely out of agricultural use. Under this zoning, the half of the farm protected from construction can be purchased at agricultural value (much less than the development value) by another farmer, perhaps one with neighboring fields or a young farmer who could never afford to buy this at full development value. Thus, the loss of an entire farm can be avoided while the opportunities for established or novice farmers can be increased.

Benefits for Homeowners and Developers

To minimize any conflicts which might arise between normal farming operations and homeowners unfamiliar with farming, open space zoning typically contains design standards to minimize the length of the border between a house lot and farmland. Current standards also require the developer to plant a buffer strip at least 75 feet wide with fast-growing native trees and grasses.

Homeowners are also served by having the scenic and productive farmland around them protected through conservation easements. Often co-signed by several local or statewide conservation groups, these easements are permanently attached to the deed and typically permit only farming and forestry uses (and occasionally certain types of informal outdoor recreation).

Open space zoning also assures that developers cannot include land unsuitable for building, such as wetlands and floodplains, from their density calculations. This represents another improvement over standard cluster regulations. By planning subdivision development under open space zoning,

(continued on page 6...)

Thoughts to Ponder . . .

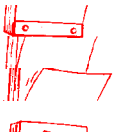
By Bill Gradle, Illinois NRCS State Conservationist, Champaign, Illinois

For decades, conservationists across the country have used the "T" concept as a guide to setting conservation goals. We determined what we could "afford" to lose with regard to soil losses to erosion based upon what the natural processes of the Good Earth could restore. We arrived at some number deemed "Tolerable" and we use these "T" levels as a measuring stick in our fight against erosion.

Every day we get closer and closer to reaching these "T" levels. And although we may never actually reach the goal--because conservation is an ongoing way of living--being aware of these naturally ocurring limits provides the guidance, structure, and boundaries for the management decisions we must make. And since these limits are based on science, and not on speculation, it makes our job a bit more predictable and justifies why we continue to fight the fight.

Another fight that looms on the conservation horizon is the fight between the need for developed land and the need for productive farmland. We know we have a real need for roads and homes and schools for a growing population. And we know we still need to have farms which grow food to feed Americans and populations abroad. So I find myself asking the question "Is there a "T" or "tolerable" level for urban developed land?" Do we need to determine just how much of this nation's rich, fertile, and productive farmland we can AFFORD to lose before our ability to sustain ourselves is compromised? And don't we need to know what those "T" levels are in advance so that we can recognize the danger long before it comes time to pay the price?

We have the tools and the conservation professionals to measure how our land use is changing in the nation and in individual states. A simple look at how much prime farmland we've lost in Illinois in the past 5 years reveals just how severe a problem we face. But who draws the line between what is tolerable and what will be our downfall? Can the government draw that line or does that responsibility fall on the shoulders of each of us, and each of our communities?



Events, Workshops, Meetings, Conferences . . .

International Erosion Control Association's 32nd Annual Conference and Expo, February 5-9, 2001 in Las Vegas, NV. See website at www.ieca.org

Plants out of Place: Invasive Plant Conference for the Upper Midwest, March 1-2, 2001, Eau Claire, WI. Contact (715) 834-9672 for more information.

Illinois Renewable Natural Resources Conference, March 7-9, 2001, Peoria, IL. Sponsored by Illinois Chapters of the Wildlife Society, American Fisheries, SWCSI, Society of American Foresters, and the Environmental Education Association. For more information call (309) 543-3950 or email ayetter@mail.inhs.uiuc.edu

12th Northern Illinois Prairie Workshop, March 10, 2001. Registration information available through the College of DuPage registrar.

Illinois Lake Management Association's 16th Annual Conference, March 23-24, 2001, Peoria, IL. Call 800-338-6976 or email wildick@mc.net for more information.

Building With Trees, National Conference, March 26-28, 2001, Lied Conference Center, Nebraska City, NE. Sponsored by National Arbor Day Foundation and National Association of Home Builders. Call 888-448-7337 for registration details.

It's Wild in Chicago 2001, April 7 - 10, 2001, The Field Museum, Chicago, IL. Contact Betsy Axley at baxley@fmnh.org for more information on this educational outreach event.

Urban Wildlife Management, National Conference, May 1-3, 2001, Lied Conference Center, Nebraska City, NE. Sponsored by National Arbor Day Foundation. Call 888-448-7337 for registration information.

Urban Wetlands: Protecting and Enhancing the Resource; Society of Wetland Scientists, 22nd Annual Conference, May 27 - June 1, 2001, Chicago, IL. Contact Mike Miller (217) 333-7093 or see www.sws.org for more details.

Diffuse/Nonpoint Pollution and Watershed Management, 5th International Conference, June 10-15, 2001, Milwaukee, WI. Sponsored by the International Water Association. See http://www.mu.edu/environment.iwa-page.htm for details.

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Visit NRCS' Internet Homepage at: http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov

USDA NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS Profile: District Conservationist Thomas Ryterske

Tom Ryterske learned to appreciate nature and conservation while growing up on the suburban fringe of Racine, Wisconsin. Tom credits his father with nurturing his interest in conservation through father-son hunting and fishing trips which began when Tom was just three years old. "Many nights when Dad got home from work, we would go to my grandparents' home on the lake and fish for perch until dusk," he recalls. Frequent nature excursions became routine for Tom, who stays close to land to this day.

Tom also feels his teachers played a part in cultivating his conservation interests. After two years at the University of Wisconsin - Parkside, Tom studied conservation at UW - Stevens Point and was required to take the basic 3-hour soils course. Luckily, the professor turned out to be one of those rare and inspiring educators, and Tom enrolled in 15 hours of soils classes in his last two years. UW also required a six-week summer course at Clam Lake Wisconsin where, immersed in the north woods, students experience a variety of natural resources studies and procedures while reading Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and John Muir.

After graduation in 1972, Tom was invited to join the army. This conflicted with his wedding plans, so Tom pushed up his wedding date and married Donna in November—six days before reporting for duty. Upon his return, Tom began work on his Masters degree in Natural Resource Management. After obtaining the MS in 1976 he accepted a position as a soil scientist for the State of North Dakota. Tom worked with the project soil survey team in Bottineau, ND. With a land area of 1,092,480 acres and a population of 9,500, Bottineau County was a solitary place for a soil scientist to work.

Tom moved to Grand Forks, ND when SCS took him on in 1977 as a soil scientist. He worked on the Project Soil Survey for two years and spent six months as a soil conservationist. He focused primarily on water conservation and wind erosion control and spent most of his time working on windbreaks. By 1980, Tom and his growing family were ready to return to the Midwest. He accepted his current position as District Conservationist in St. Charles, IL in August, 1980.

As DC, Tom is responsible for all NRCS programs in Kane and DuPage Counties. He has a strong commitment to working for local people and problems and feels his education and experience are most valuable and rewarding when assisting people at the field level. "I feel I'm passing on the science and the art of using natural resources wisely by helping people use the land within the resources' natural limits," says Tom.

Working in conservation is more than a job for Tom. It's been a way of living in harmony with the natural world. "I can still show you where the first waterway I designed is; or where the first terraces are; or where wildlife habitat projects are. I still remember seeing a moose and her calf grazing a willow thicket when I was laying out a windbreak; or the first time I flushed a jack rabbit when I was mapping soils, or coming up over a hill to see a rather large bull; or how a field of flax looks like water when it's in full bloom." And yes, he can still tell you how he felt on those early hunting trips with his father.

Conservation Concepts...

....Looking for a Diversion?

Taken from NRCS' Urban Manual

If you're looking for a diversion that does not involve television or spectator sports, you can stop searching. For real entertainment, try building your own diversion—a channel with supporting ridges that routes excess surface water to an area of safe disposal! Not the diversion you expected? This kind is built across slopes, below steep grades, and around buildings or areas vulnerable to damage from runoff. When properly constructed, they prevent damage from floods, soil erosion, and sedimentation.

Diversions should be a planned part of initial site development. Take into account the amount of runoff and sedimentation anticipated both during and after construction. Evaluate function, need, velocity control, outlet stability, and site aesthetics. Other factors to consider include outlet condition, topography, land use, length of slope, and soil type. Also remember to check state drainage laws, traditional case law precedents, and local ordinances and regulations--just to make sure everything is legal.

A temporary diversion should be in place during site construction to control runoff. Also be sure to protect the channel and ridges from damage by construction equipment. Conditions of the completed site will dictate the location, type of stabilization, and configurations of the permanent diversion. Diversions protecting minor structures should have enough capacity to carry peak runoff of a 25-year storm. Those built near major structures such as homes and schools need to handle 100-year storm runoff. Consider designing an emergency overflow section or bypass area to limit damage from storms that exceed design limitations.

Each diversion needs a safe, stable outlet with adequate capacity. Direct sediment-laden water through an approved sediment trapping device before it enters receiving surface waters. Water should not drain onto the right-of-way of a public road, highway, or other public utility without written approval of appropriate authorities. Acceptable outlets might include grass lined channels, impoundment structures, rock outlets, and infiltration trenches. For more information on these and other outlets, consult the NRCS Urban Manual.

The shape of the channel may vary depending on the equipment used to build and maintain the diversion as long as the side slopes are stable. Grades should allow water to travel quickly enough to avoid sedimentation but not so fast as to cause erosion. Grades should minimize standing water and wetness problems. Stabilize diversions with vegetation or materials such as riprap, paving stone, or concrete as soon as possible, generally within 15 days after construction. Finally, establish a program to maintain the diversion capacity, storage, ridge, height, vegetation and outlet. Don't forget to inspect diversions after every major rainfall and make repairs promptly. If you take care of the structure, you will create quite a "pleasant diversion."

Book Notes

***"The Meadow"* and *"Fencing the Sky"* --** *By James Galvin. Both these non-fiction books tell touching tales about a time in our country's early history when many landowners had a more intimate relationship with their surroundings; living in a way that was very reverent and tender. The author has a real-life passion for the land use issues that we face today and through his writing hopes to bridge the gap between those who live on and work the land and environmentalists.*

MIND-BENDERS...

Total U.S. population density: 78 people per square mile.

Total U.S. population density minus Alaska: 93 people per square mile.

Subtract agricultural land: 174 people per square mile.

Subtract Federal land: 302 people per square mile.

By the year 2050, the U.S. population will be 390 million, which will increase our population density from 302 people per square mile to 446 people per square mile.

Is it getting crowded in here or is it just me...?

Had a Change of Heart?

If you are currently on our mailing list but no longer want to receive this newsletter, please let us know. Current budget restraints require NRCS to cut costs wherever possible. Please call us at (630) 505-7808 to be removed from our list of subscribers. Thanks!

Would you like to receive *Conservation and Your Community*"? Provide us the information below to get on our mailing list!

Name _____

Organization/Affiliation _____

Address _____

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Call or send information to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Chicago Metro Office, 603 East Diehl Road, Suite #131, Naperville, IL 60563; PH: (630) 505-7808/FX: (630) 505-7992. ***THANK YOU!***

Local Ordinances and Their Impact: Getting What You Want

By: Keith Eichorst, NRCS Community Planner, Naperville, IL

It's been said that in many developing communities, there are often profound discrepancies between what an ordinance consists of, what the local city council wants, and what the community's conservation planners says needs to happen. The bottom line is that ordinances are usually written on Mars while conservation plans are written on Venus. The challenge is to find ways to ensure that what your local ordinance requires is actually what you want. How do you ensure that what's on the books helps you achieve the dream?

Counties, townships, and municipalities have the authority to develop and enact laws pertaining to their jurisdiction. These laws, called ordinances, allow local units of government to implement the will of the people as it concerns health, safety, and welfare.

For an ordinance to be effective, three things must happen:

1) the ordinance must be written correctly (language);

2) the ordinance must be considered fair, with public review and "buy-in;" and

3) the ordinance must be adequately enforced.

Language

The first thing that must occur, after discovering the need for the ordinance, is that the ordinance structure and language must contain specific factors that are needed to address the need. All ordinances include a number of sections that make them effective.

Effective ordinances usually begin with a purpose section, which concisely states the need of the ordinance and its intent. A definition of terms section is usually included, to precisely define words and minimize confusion. After that, an ordinance can vary greatly in language, depending on the type, but the one thing effective ordinances have in common is that they are clearly written and organized. Effective ordinances with regulatory functions should have enforcement and penalty sections. The enforcement section should list procedures on enforcement. The penalty section needs to include penalties severe enough to discourage ordinance violations.

Public Input

The second thing needed for an effective ordinance is public input. Even if the ordinance language and structure are correct, an ordinance could still be ineffective if those governed by the ordinance believe it is blatently unfair or beyond the governing authority to address. Local law is based upon public input, and plenty of examples can be cited of laws--both locally and nationally--declared unconstitutional by creating undue hardship upon some or all of the governed. If the governing body insists on enforcing this type of ordinance, the fairness issue may be legally brought before the judicial system. The

easiest, most effective way to avoid passing an unfair ordinance is to incorporate public input into its development. This public input may be solicited through public meetings, surveys, or one-on-one discussions. Competent legal review of the ordinance after public input is recommended to ensure compliance with local authorities and state and national laws.

Enforcement

The third element an effective ordinance usually contains is adequate enforcement. Even if the ordinance language itself is adequate and the ordinance is fair, without adequate enforcement procedures, all the work is meaningless. Implementation and the long-term benefits are the final challenge for an effective ordinance. Will the local community provide enough resources for enforcement? Can the community hire staff to enforce the ordinance, or provide resources to train existing staff?

Will the ordinance be enforced fairly? One problem with even a well-written, fair ordinance is uneven enforcement. An ordinance cannot be strictly enforced against one individual and less strictly enforced against another. Inconsistent enforcement may ultimately render a good ordinance ineffective. Care must be taken to ensure ordinances are consistently enforced throughout all communities.

While the challenges to developing an effective ordinance may seem daunting, the rewards can make it worthwhile. Effective ordinances accomplish what local communities are supposed to do: protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community at large. Mars and Venus are indeed different planets, but they revolve around the same sun and have their special place in the universe.

Newsletter Now Available on Web

Beginning with the summer 2000 issue, the ***Conservation and Your Community*** newsletter is available on the web at NRCS Illinois website www.il.nrcs.usda.gov. If you are currently receiving our newsletter through the mail, and would prefer to read it from our homepage, please let us know so that we can save on printing and mailing costs.

Ten More Join Chicago Wilderness

At the fall meeting of Chicago Wilderness, ten new members were voted into Chicago Wilderness, bringing the number of members/organizations to 124.

New members include: The Butterfly Monitoring Network; Chicago Herpetological Society; DuPage Birding Club; The Garden Club of Illinois, Inc; Grand Calumet Task Force; Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District; Natural Lands Institute; University of Illinois Extension, Northeast Region; University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign Office of Continuing Education; and Waukegan Harbor Citizens Advisory Group (Council). For a complete list of members and current activities, visit the website at www.chicagowilderness.org

NRCS Partner Profiles:

Illinois Association for Floodplain & Stormwater Management

The Association of State Floodplain Managers is a national organization of professionals involved in floodplain management, flood hazard mitigation, the National Flood Insurance Program, and flood preparedness, warning, and recovery. ASFPM has become a respected voice in floodplain management practice and policy in the United States because it represents the flood hazard specialists of local, state, and federal government, the research community, the insurance industry, and the fields of engineering, hydrologic forecasting, emergency response, water resources, and others.

The Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management, one of the oldest and largest State Chapters of the ASFPM, was founded in 1986 by professionals interested in and responsible for floodplain and stormwater management in the State of Illinois. The Illinois Chapter's objectives are to promote the common interest in floodplain and stormwater management; enhance cooperation among various local, state, and federal agencies; and encourage effective and innovative approaches to managing the State's floodplain and stormwater management systems. "We believe that through coordinated, well-informed efforts, the public and private sectors can reduce loss of human life and property damage resulting from flooding. We can preserve the natural and cultural values of floodplains and avoid actions that exacerbate flooding in our communities," says Vince Parisi, Chair of the Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management (IAFSM).

IAFSM's mission is in alignment with those of NRCS, since both organizations seek to protect resources--natural resources and community resources. "NRCS supports the IAFSM Annual Conference because it offers a great opportunity to bring together all the players involved in helping communities face stormwater challenges," says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle.

The IAFSM publishes a quarterly newsletter to inform members on important topics such as current legislation, local activities, hazard mitigation, new state and federal programs, publications, conferences, workshops, and job openings. In addition, they hold an annual conference and provide training opportunities in floodplain and stormwater management technologies at reduced member rates. The conference is extremely valuable and is well attended by a diverse range of decision-makers and community officials.

"I believe that when IAFSM members meet and work with NRCS' technical specialists, it helps keep all of us up to date and current on the many complex floodplain issues that impact Illinois' communities," says Parisi. Visit the webpage at www.illinoisfloods.org for more information on ways to get involved.

(Open Space Zoning...from page 1.)

towns can continue to maintain the character of single-family dwellings in those districts where a departure would be inappropriate. In fact, homes on compact "village-scale" lots could also help reinforce the character of many rural settlements, where houses were traditionally located close together before modern zoning began to impose large-lot suburban sprawl.

Developers too can benefit from open space zoning. Allowed to construct buildings closer together, they can reduce their construction costs for roads and for water and sewer systems. Permanently protected views and nearby open space make attractive selling points to potential home buyers, many of whom are willing to pay a premium for an alternative to living in a conventional and unimaginative subdivision, Historically, housing close to conservation areas has shown to appreciate faster as well.

One of Many Useful Tools

Open space zoning is an important addition to the many tools available to help protect farmland. Clearly, with situations differing in regions and communities across the country, no one protection technique can be the absolute answer. While protecting entire farms through programs such as Purchase of Development Rights, is preferable, this method is not always viable. PDR programs do not exist in many areas, while in the areas where they do exist, there is often insufficient money in the state government or among private land trusts to fund them. In this case, open space zoning offers the best hope for farmers who need funds to improve or expand their operations.

Open space zoning can increase the amount of farmland permanently protected at no cost to public programs. Essentially, it amounts to "privatizing" some of the development-rights purchases without adding extra costs to developers and government or inconveniencing farmers.

Making it Work

In order to be truly effective, open space zoning must become a requirement, not simply an option. Twenty years of experience with "optional cluster" zoning has demonstrated that only 10 percent of developers voluntarily stray from the typical suburban pattern of houses with large lots. It seems that many do not realize that open space zoning can increase the marketability– and profitability – of their subdivisions, while creating many public benefits as well.

It is encouraging to note, however, that an increasing number of Northeastern towns are requiring "open space subdivision design" for all new developments proposed in certain natural resource areas – areas which include farmland, riverbanks, lakefront, ridgelines, and summits. As they implement this method, these communities will help teach planners, developers, and farmers that innovative planning offers a wealth of economic and aesthetic advantages over conventional conversion. After all, there is no constitutional "right to sprawl." With open space zoning, there is a practical alternative to it.

Can We Talk "Compaction"!?

Compiled from information in USDA NRCS Soil Quality Urban Technical Note No. 2--NRCS Soil Quality Institute

Healthy soil includes not only the physical particles making up the soil, but also adequate pore space between the particles for the movement and storage of air and water. This pore space is necessary for plant growth, and for a favorable environment for soil organisms to live.

Compaction occurs when soil particles are pressed together, thereby reducing the amount of pore space. Examples of compaction in urban settings are traffic pans resulting from repeated trips across lots with trucks and machinery and excessive trampling by people, bicycles, etc. Soils are particularly susceptible to compaction if these activities occur when the soil is wet.

The primary impacts of soil compation are changes in the soil's physical properties:

Strength increases with compaction. Soil strength is the ability to resist penetration by an applied force and is desireable under roads and buildings.

Bulk Density increases with compaction. Bulk density is the weight of soil per volume. It is commonly reported as grams of "oven dry" soil per cubic centimeter.

Porosity decreases with compaction. Porosity is the ratio of the volume of pores to the bulk volume of the soil. With compaction, the distribution of pores shifts toward smaller pore sizes.

All these changes influence the movement of air and water in the soil, ease of root growth, and the biological diversity and activity in the soil. For proper plant growth, void space must be available for air and water movement.

Compared to agricultural land, compaction in urban areas can be more permanent because of the difficulty in bringing in equipment to loosen the soil, due to the presense of utilities and the prevalence of perennial vegetation.

Many of the problems associated with urban compaction can be avoided during urban development through proper planning. Working with local governments may help prevent total compaction in developed areas.

Soil that will support lawns can be protected against future problems by subsoiling, or by stockpiling topsoil that will be returned to the site after construction. These two measures can restore water flow functions to "near natural" conditions. Establishing sod or seeding a lawn will be more successful on a loose soil with topsoil than on a compacted soil without adequate topsoil.

In parks and recreation hot spots, specific areas can be designated for heavy traffic--paved areas or trails. Remaining vegetated areas will benefit from less compaction because traffic is controlled. The long-term benefits of avoiding compaction can result in more satisfied homeowners, better infiltration and reduced runoff, lower mortality rates for perennial vegetation, and better overall plant growth.

Principles of Construction Erosion Control

Soil erosion on construction sites may only affect a small acreage of land in any particular watershed, but it is a major source of sediment because the potention for erosion on highly disturbed land is commonly 100 times greater than on agricultural land. Here are some simple principles to remember:

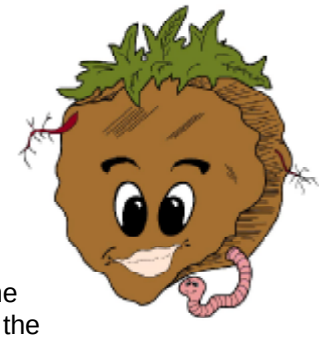
- Ö Divide construction projects into smaller phases, clearing smaller areas of vegetation.
- Ö Schedule excavation during low rainfall periods when possible.
- Ö Fit development plans to the terrain, the lay of the land.
- Ö Excavate immediately before construction instead of leaving soils exposed for months or years.
- Ö Cover distrubed soils as soon as possible with vegetation or other materials.
- Ö Divert water from disturbed areas.
- Ö Control concentrated flow and runoff to reduce the volume and velocity of water from work sites to prevent formation of rills and gullies.
- Ö Minimize length and steepness of slopes (use bench terraces).
- Ö Prevent sediment movement off-site.
- Ö Inspect and maintain any structural measures to keep them in working order.
- Ö Where wind erosion is a concern, plan and install windbreaks.
- Ö Avoid soil compaction by restricting the use of trucks and heavy equipment to limited areas.
- Ö Soils compacted by grading need to be broken up or tilled prior to vegetating or placement of sod.

Conservation Terminology

***nd Use Planning*--**Decision-making
ess to determine present and future uses of
nd. The resulting plan is the key element of a comprehensive plan describing recommended location and intensity of development of public and private land uses, such as residential, commericial, industrial, recreational, and agricultural.

This newsletter is published quarterly by USDA NRCS. Send correspondence, articles, photos, calendar items, or questions to Paige Mitchell-Buck, Conservation and your Community Editor c/o NRCS , 1902 Fox Drive, Champaign, IL 61820 or call (217) 353-6606

Out of the Field and Onto the "Floor"



By: Paige Buck, NRCS Communications Specialist, Champaign, IL

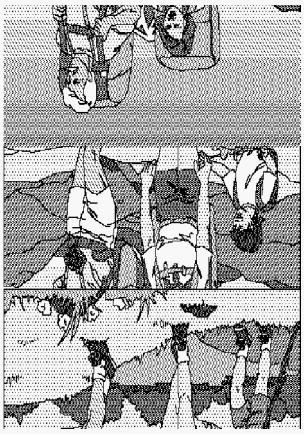
Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History is still raking in visitors to the "Underground Adventure" exhibit on the wonders of soil. As part of our involvement with the project, NRCS continues to play a role and take advantage of the opportunity this exhibit offers us to interact with the public.

On special Saturdays throughout the spring and summer months, the Museum opens to the public at a special rate to encourage students and families to come, see, and learn.

On these days, NRCS is there too! NRCS Soil Scientists volunteer to serve as a "Scientist on the Floor," manning an exhibit in the Mud Room--the final phase of the Underground Adventure--where all the lessons and concepts of the exhibit culminate and where there are even more things to touch and see. This is where kids "cut loose" experimenting with a wide array of hands-on activities, computer and role-playing games, and other fun things to do. This is also where all the unanswered questions arise in the minds of visitors of all ages. And luckily, NRCS is there to answer those questions! On both occasions that I visited the Underground, I wanted to visit with our NRCS scientist on the floor, but couldn't get anywhere near the table because there was a horde of kids, parents, and questions blocking my way. How often to soil scientists get *that* kind of attention?!

All those who have manned the booth confirm that it is a great opportunity and a terrific experience. Estimates are that NRCS speaks with anywhere from 400 to 500 people in one day. And all those people leave The Field Museum knowing a whole lot more about the soil beneath their feet than they did when they walked in!

Places to Visit . . .



It may be cold now, but make plans to visit the Morton Arboretum's new Big Rock Visitor Station, a progressive exhibit with trails, educational opportunities, native Illinois plants, and more. The area is designed to be fun and accessible for visitors of all ages and abilities. For more information, contact the Mortom Arboretum or visit the Thornhill Education Center in Lisle, IL.

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Community Assistance
Vision

To provide Illinois communities, units of government, and other clients with quality NRCS products and services that balance land development needs with natural resource conservation issues. This goal will be accomplished by a NRCS network of professional teams working together to address significant community issues

Newsletter Highlights:

- ***Open Space Planning***
- ***Mars & Venus in the Planning Room***
- ***Construction Site Erosion Control: A Crash Course***